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SUBJECT: QATARI MEDIA WARM TO SUDAN SPECIAL ENVOY

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KEY POINTS  
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-- Al Jazeera Arabic and English aired two interviews with Special Envoy for Sudan Richard Williamson on November 25 in prime time.

-- Qatari local newspapers provided accurate, prominent coverage of Williamson's press roundtable. An op-ed on November 29 highlighted the Government of Sudan's lack of credibility.

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COMMENTS  
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-- (SBU) Qatar News Agency head Sheikh Jabor bin Yusuf Al Thani, who is close to the Prime Minister, told Ambassador that he found the Special Envoy's media engagements positive and helpful.

-- (SBU) At a time when the USG is trying to help steer Qatar's efforts on Darfur in the right direction, media engagements like this one -- demonstrating that we are supportive, but also clearly communicating our goals and views -- are vital to our diplomatic efforts.

11. (U) Responding to requests from post, Al Jazeera English and Al Jazeera Arabic (two separate channels) arranged back-to-back interviews for Special Envoy Williamson on November 25. The first, a 15-minute live-to-tape interview, aired on Al Jazeera English during news bulletins in the prime 1300 - 1500 GMT time slot. (NOTE: A prominent background image of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir scowling provided an appropriate visual for the Special Envoy's points on the Government of Sudan's lack of credibility. END NOTE)

12. (U) Williamson then appeared live on Al Jazeera's main afternoon news bulletin as the "Mid-Day Guest," a format in which a guest is interviewed by two news presenters on the news of the day. The seven-minute segment provided an opportunity for the Special Envoy to demonstrate USG support for Qatar's efforts on Darfur; emphasize the central role of the African Union mediator; and call for implementation of commitments by the GOS and rebel groups. The interview aired at 1330 GMT.

13. (U) All seven Qatari newspapers also provided prominent coverage of Williamson's remarks at a press roundtable held at the Ambassador's residence. Most headlines focused on U.S. support for Qatar's initiative, and the articles accurately reflected Williamson's comments. Two newspapers also included in their headlines the Special Envoy's assessment that the Security Council would not take action to stop a process within the International Criminal Court related to President Bashir.

14. (U) An op-ed published in Arabic-language daily "Al Raya" addressed the lack of confidence suffered by the GOS as a result of corruption and tensions within the regime. The article ended with the question, "Are those in charge of the country up to this mission so that they can uproot those who hinder the implementation process and were also a reason that the lack of confidence took root?"

15. TEXT of Opening Statement by Richard C. Williamson - Press Roundtable - November 24, 2008

It's a great pleasure for me to be in Doha; I thank all of you for taking the time to come out and let me visit with you, especially our friend from Sudan. The U.S. goal in Sudan has been and remains relieving the great humanitarian suffering that continues. In our efforts to make progress in relieving that humanitarian suffering, we welcome the Qatar initiative and Qatar's role as a diplomatic leader in this region.

Mr. Bassol, the former Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso, is the joint mediator for the African Union and the United Nations, which the United States strongly supports; he has a unique role to play as a mediator between the parties. In my discussions today with the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, I had the opportunity to discuss the need for close coordination between Qatari officials and the Qatari initiative with Mr. Bassol and his efforts.

Unfortunately, past pledges by the Government of Sudan have not been lived up to. There's a history of declarations followed by delay, diversion, denial, and non-performance. Therefore, it's particularly challenging to bring the parties together because there's such a lack of trust, which is why the United States continues to demand there be concrete, verifiable progress on the ground. This is a goal shared by the leadership in Qatar. We join with them in working to get those concrete, verifiable steps on the ground to bring in humanitarian assistance. It's time to translate promises and declarations into action, and the United States looks forward to working closely with Qatar as they accept a leadership position in trying to bring international

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pressure and cooperation for progress. Thank you and I'll be happy to take any of your questions.

16. (U) Khartoum minimize considered.  
LEBARON